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Letter dated 5 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from Najib Ghadbian, Special Representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, dated 5 January 2016 (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and circulated as a document of the Council.

(*Signed*) Abdallah **Al-Mouallimi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 5 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with grave alarm that I draw your attention to the deliberate and systematic starvation of 40,000 civilians in the Syrian town of Madaya, where Hezbollah militias and Syrian regime forces are currently perpetrating a deadly siege, in direct violation of a local truce reached in late September 2015.

The siege on Madaya, where over half of the population had previously fled violent clashes and Syrian regime barrel bombs in Zabadani city, is now entering its seventh month. For over 200 days, the Syrian regime has blockaded the town, while Hezbollah forces have trapped Madaya's population using a combination of 6,000 landmines and numerous checkpoints designed to prevent the delivery of aid to this heavily populated town and starve Madaya's 40,000 residents into submission. In the process, Madaya has become a Hezbollah-manned open-air prison where residents are denied access to food, water and medicine.

In December 2015 alone, 31 civilians died of starvation or in attempting to escape Madaya. Today, 1,200 residents are believed to be living with preventable chronic illnesses, and 300 children are suffering needlessly from malnutrition and other diseases. Residents estimate that 850 infants are in urgent need of milk and 6 newborns have died because of a dire lack of food. The scarcity of basic goods has caused prices to skyrocket. One kilogram of basic staples — like rice or flour — are believed to have reached prices approaching $100. Denied access to basic resources, Madaya residents have resorted to eating leaves, insects and cats.

The starvation of Madaya residents is as preventable as it is illegal. Repeated Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015), have explicitly prohibited the use of siege tactics by all parties to the Syrian conflict. This includes resolution 2254 (2015), in which the Council unanimously called upon all parties to the crisis to "allow immediate humanitarian assistance to reach all people in need, in particular in all besieged and hard-to-reach areas". Yet the Syrian regime's deadly siege of Madaya continues unabated, and has gone without so much as condemnation from the Security Council.

The siege of Madaya is costing civilian lives. It is also imperilling the political process. The ongoing horrors in Madaya have happened in spite of a local truce, forged in September 2015, which was meant to allow for the cessation of violence and the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance into Foua, Kafraya in Idleb and Zabadani and Madaya in Rif Damascus. Yet to date, life-saving assistance continues to be denied to the people of Madaya, where tens of thousands remain trapped, despite recent efforts by the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to facilitate the evacuation of local residents. The systematic starvation of Madaya residents by Hezbollah and the Assad regime is clearly designed to impede the impending third round of negotiations in Geneva and to render a ceasefire unattainable.

On behalf of the residents of Madaya and all the people of Syria, I therefore appeal to the Security Council to work with urgency to:

(a) Condemn the Syrian regime and Hezbollah for their starvation tactics and war on civilians in Madaya, and make absolutely clear that the deliberate starvation of innocent civilians will not be tolerated in the lead-up to the third round of negotiations in Geneva or at any other point;

(b) Enforce Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2254 (2015) and 2258 (2015) and provide immediate humanitarian aid and relief to the residents of Madaya, as well as all people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Where necessary owing to non-compliance by the Syrian regime, the Security Council should take further measures under the Charter of the United Nations, as required by resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015);

(c) Protect Syrian civilians in Madaya and the whole of Syria, including through the enforcement of a no-bombing zone to stop the number one killer of Syrian civilians: indiscriminate aerial bombardment. Clear guarantees of civilian protection in the run-up to the third round of the Geneva peace talks would provide the leverage needed to make sure a ceasefire is reached and held, so that a lasting political transition can be achieved.

Madaya's civilians cannot tolerate one day longer under Assad's brutal siege. They need effective implementation of existing Security Council resolutions to guarantee them the humanitarian aid and basic human rights they require. Madaya's civilians urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection from the Syrian regime and Hezbollah. The world cannot and must not allow the siege of Madaya to become just another chapter in Syrian civilians' five years of suffering. Through the actions and resolve of Member States, we can stop the siege of Madaya and ensure that 2016 marks the end of the Syria crisis.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations